



POST-PROGRAM ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS, BEHAVIORS, AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES
SOUTHERN IRAQ JOBS (BAWSALA IRAQ 2019-2020)



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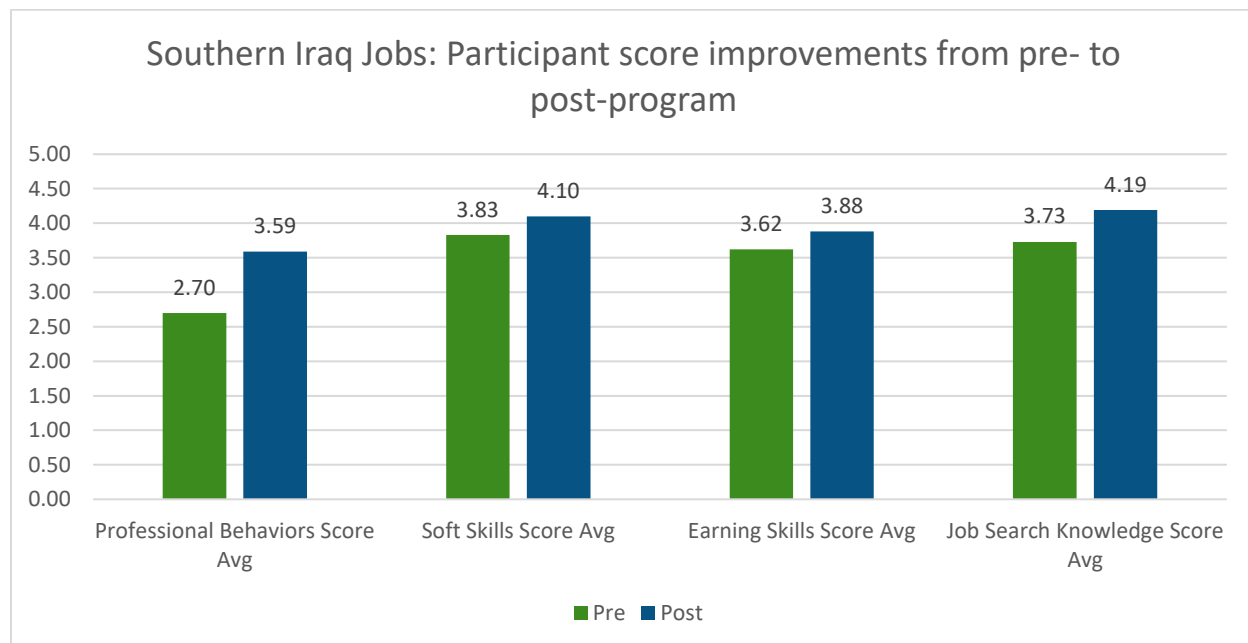
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southern Iraq Job Skills program, funded by the US Embassy in Iraq, and building on World Learning’s Bawsala Career Mentorship approach, was intended to increase the ability of 60 youth in Southern Iraq to find or create employment in the private sector and serve as positive influences in their communities. This analysis reports on several achievements in knowledge, skills, behaviors, and economic outcomes that the project tracked with program participants using specialized assessment tools.

Our data shows that Southern Iraq Jobs program participants improved in all four of the knowledge and skills domains that we measured as important outcomes of the program:

1. **Professional Behaviors** (regularly checking email, maintaining a LinkedIn profile, having a clear career plan, producing customized CVs and cover letters, applying for jobs and business funding, taking part in interviews, meeting professionals relevant to their career goals, attending professional networking events, and engaging in professional development activities)
2. **Soft Skills** (conscientiousness and self-efficacy, goal-setting and perseverance, interpersonal/social skills, managing emotions, and thinking and planning skills)
3. **Earning Skills** (job search skills and entrepreneurship skills)
4. **Job Search Knowledge** (known best practices for a successful job search)

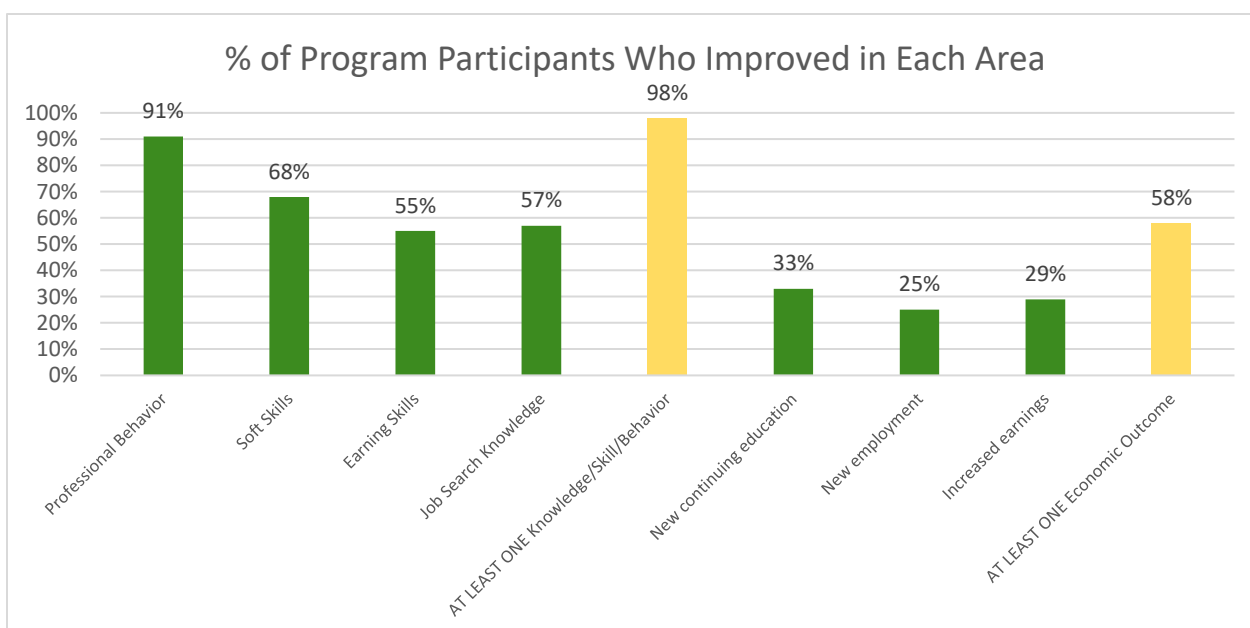
In each area, participants were assigned a score on a scale of 1-5 based on their responses to a set of questions. The below chart shows average pre-program and post-program scores in each domain, clearly indicating their improved knowledge, skills, and behaviors from beginning to end of the program.



In addition, we tracked three important indicators of improved youth economic outcomes: participation in further studies, employment (in any income-generating activity), and increased earnings. The percentage of all participants continuing their education increased from 39% to 73%, employment increased from 32% to 49%, and average weekly earnings increased from US\$88 to US\$100. These are very significant achievements considering that program coincided with serious security problems in Southern Iraq and with the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Pre	Post	# Participants with positive change
% in studies (of all participants)	39%	73%	18 (33%)
% employed (of all participants)	32%	49%	14 (25%)
Average weekly earnings among employed	\$ 88.65	\$100.32	16 (29%)
Participants who improved status in at least one of the above			32 (58%)

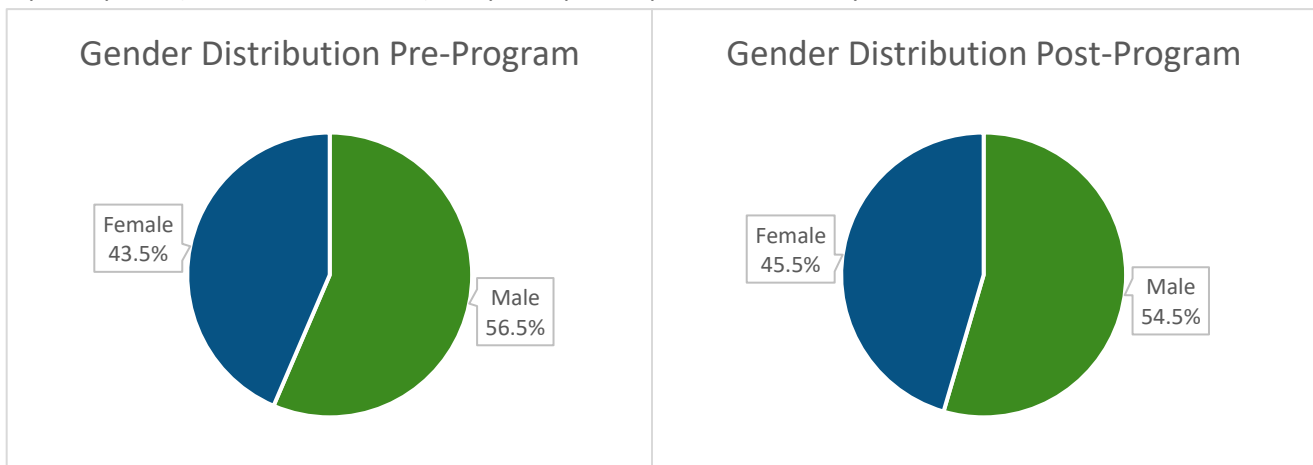
Overall, participants clearly benefited from the Southern Iraq Job Skills Program, with meaningful improvements in their knowledge, skills, behaviors, and their economic status over the course of their participation in the program. At an individual level, 91% of our participants improved in their professional behaviors, 68% improved their soft skills, 55% improved their earning skills, and 57% improved their job search knowledge, **with 98% improving in at least one of these domains of knowledge, skills, and behaviors**. Furthermore, 33% of participants were newly enrolled in continuing education or training, 25% had obtained new employment, and 29% increased their earnings, with 58% improving their status in at least one of these outcomes.



INTRODUCTION

The Southern Iraq Job Skills program, funded by the US Embassy in Iraq, and building on World Learning’s Bawsala Career Mentorship approach, was intended to increase the ability of youth in Southern Iraq to find or create employment in the private sector and serve as positive influences in their communities. The project matched over 60 university and vocational students aged 19-22 with mentors for a one-year program that featured regular group meetings (over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic and security issues), and self-study of eight modules focusing on career guidance, professional skills, entrepreneurship, and successful job search techniques..

The Southern Iraq Jobs program participants were given two different assessments (the Intake/WORQ¹ and the WLSVA²) at both the beginning and end of the program to measure their knowledge, skills, and behaviors. A total of 62 participants completed at least one of these instruments at the beginning of the program (27 female, or 43.5%). Gender distribution stayed nearly the same by the end, with 55 participants (25 female, or 44.6%). No participant reported a disability.

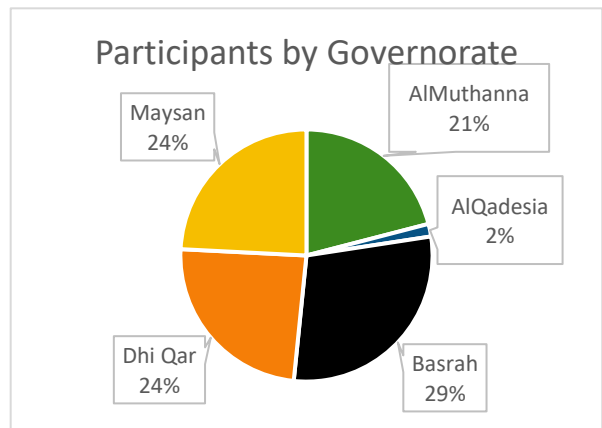


Among the original 62 participants, there was roughly equal distribution by governorate, with slightly higher representation from Basrah. The majority (84%) had completed high school, while others had completed a diploma (3%) or Bachelor’s degree (13%). Regardless of degree level, 21% had completed some type of technical or vocational training.

¹ Based on the USAID Workforce Outcomes Reporting Questionnaire Quick-WORQ, with additional program questions.

² World Learning’s WorkLinks Skills and Values Assessment, which has been psychometrically validated in Algerian Arabic and was adapted to Iraqi Arabic for the purposes of this program (see www.worldlearning.org/what-we-do/wlsva-toolkit)

The remainder of this analysis is based on comparisons of pre- and post-program data, as well as additional insights generated from the post-program assessments specifically. 56 participants took both the pre and post WorkLinks Skills and Values Assessment on soft skills and earnings skills, and 55 participants took both the pre and post WORQ Assessment of current economic activities and professional behaviors. The pre-assessments were completed within the first third of the planned curriculum³, and post assessments were completed between mid-October and mid-November of 2020, corresponding to the period of completing the final self-study module and participating in the November 5-6, 2020 closing event—in other words, these results do not take into account any post-program job search period or other post-program career plans, but rather reflect the status of participants right at the conclusion of the planned interventions.



ECONOMIC AND PARTICIPATION STATUS: STUDIES, EMPLOYMENT, AND EARNINGS

Around the world, there is concern about youth who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs). The NEET rate is a “broad measure of untapped potential of youth,” a group that is “particularly at risk of both labour market and social exclusion.”⁴ One goal of programs like Southern Iraq Jobs is therefore to ensure that youth are engaged in constructive activity—either employed in a salaried position or through running a business, or pursuing education that will improve their employment prospects in the future. To measure our progress against this goal, we look at the number of participants who decide to continue their studies, those who gain new employment, and those who increase their income.⁵

In the case of the Southern Iraq Jobs program, the percentage of all participants continuing their education increased from 39% to 73% from beginning to end of the program, with 18 individuals (33% of the final 55 participants) who were not previously studying deciding to take up a course of study. Employment increased from 32% to 49%, with 14 individuals (25%) newly gaining employment—however 4 participants lost the employment they had at the beginning of the program, for a net gain of 10 jobs.

³ In our design, pre-assessments should be completed by the end of Module 1, of a 9-part curriculum (8 modules plus a closing session); however, questions on earning skills and job search knowledge were accidentally omitted in that initial assessment and so were delivered to participants during Module 3. The likely impact of this delay is to reduce the amount of change we can detect (since participants may have already begun improving their knowledge and skills before taking the pre-test)—thus, findings in this report are likely to be on the conservative side.

⁴ ILO: Share of youth not in employment, education or training (youth NEET rate), https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/description_NEET_EN.pdf

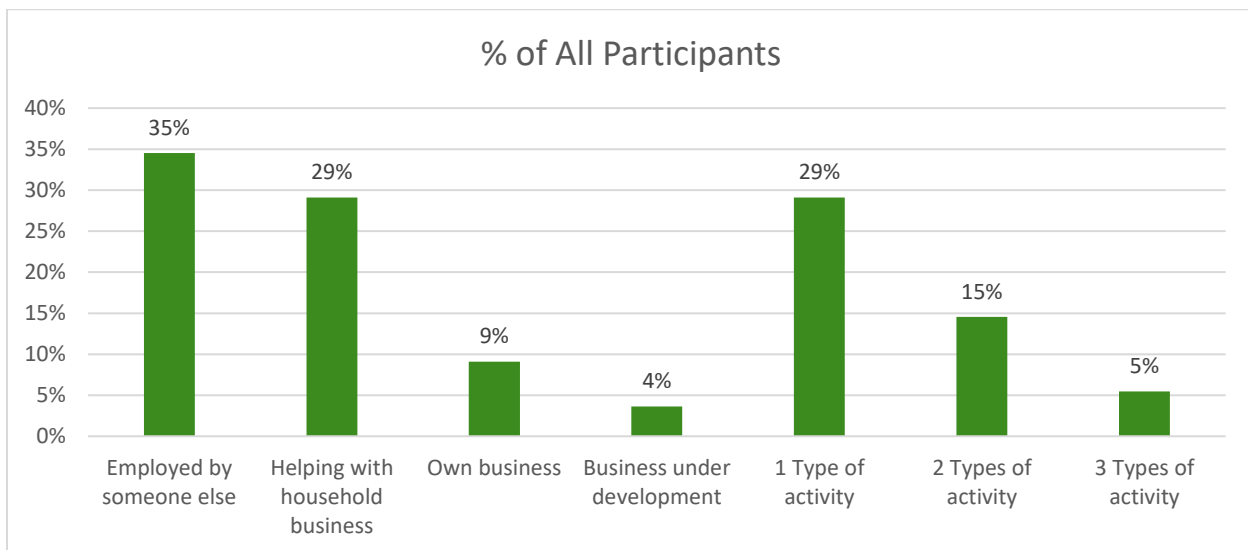
⁵ All three of these are standard US foreign assistance indicators (f-indicators).

Average weekly earnings increased from US\$88 to US\$100, with 16 participants improving their incomes—but again, 10 participants experienced a decline or even elimination of their income, resulting in a net of 6 improved incomes. At the beginning of the program, weekly incomes ranged from US\$8 to \$300 per week, while by the end of the program they ranged from \$13 to \$420 weekly.

Of the 55 participants for whom we have complete data, 32 of them (58%) improved their status in at least one of these areas during their participation in the program. These are very significant achievements considering that program coincided with serious security problems in Southern Iraq and with the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

	Pre	Post	# Participants with positive change
% in studies (of all participants)	39%	73%	18 (33%)
% employed (of all participants)	32%	49%	14 (25%)
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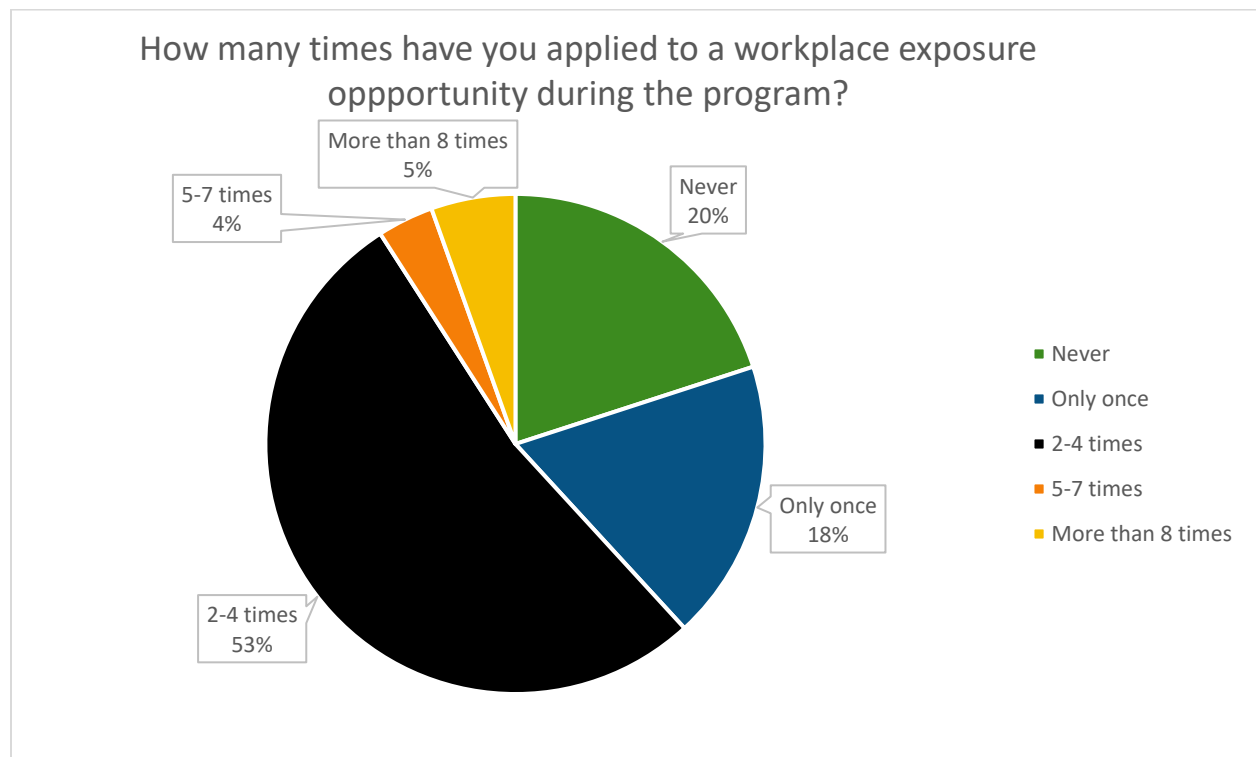
The 27 participants (49%) who were employed (reporting that they did some kind of work to earn money in the week prior to the post-assessment) engaged in a variety of different types of income-earning activities. 19 worked for someone else, 16 ran their own business, and 6 reported helping in a business that is run by someone who is related and lives in their household, while 2 more had begun business activities but were not yet earning money. 11 participants reported doing more than one type of income-earning activity.



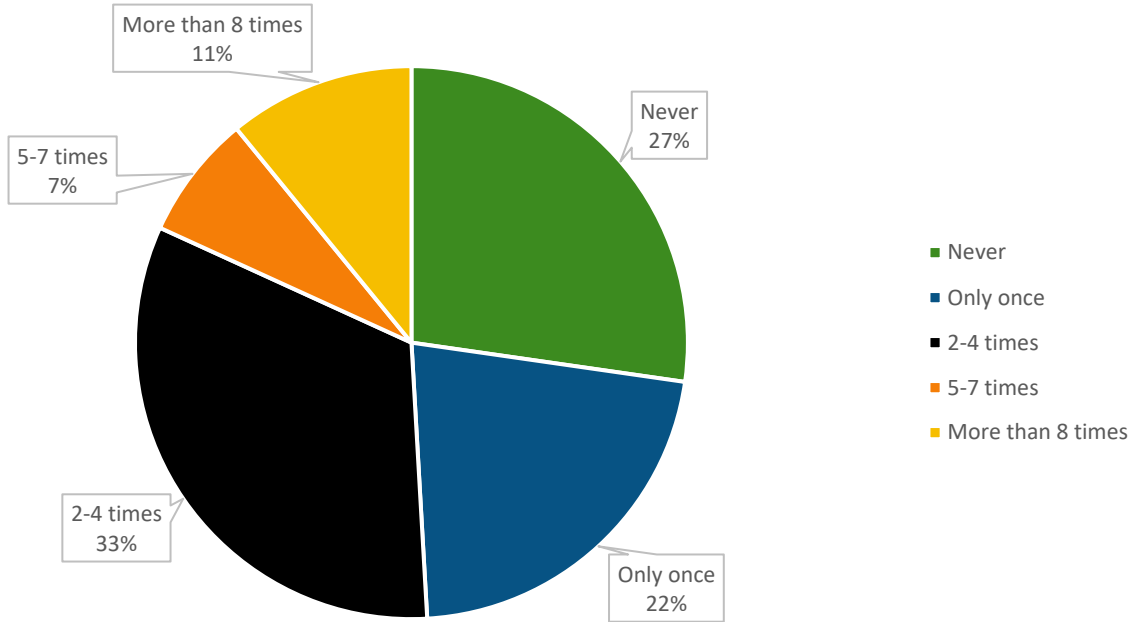
⁶ Indeed, despite the

Those who were employed by someone else included an NGO employee, two university lecturers, an English teacher, three working in online marketing and for an online payroll company, a medical representative for online pharmacy products, a project administrator on electronic shopping site, an environmental observer of water quality, a dental assistant, a restaurant employee, and sales clerks at various types of shops. It should be noted that two participants working in construction found it challenging to classify their work (one listing it as a business, the other not sure what to select), likely because they are self-employed freelance workers taking on jobs when available. Those active in their own businesses mentioned graphics design/branding, online marketing, handmade crafts, and store owners. Those who were both employed by others and also reported having a business activity usually described only their salaried employment, and there were no descriptions of the additional household businesses that some participants also assisted with. This pattern suggests that working for others is still considered the primary source of income for most participants with multiple activities.

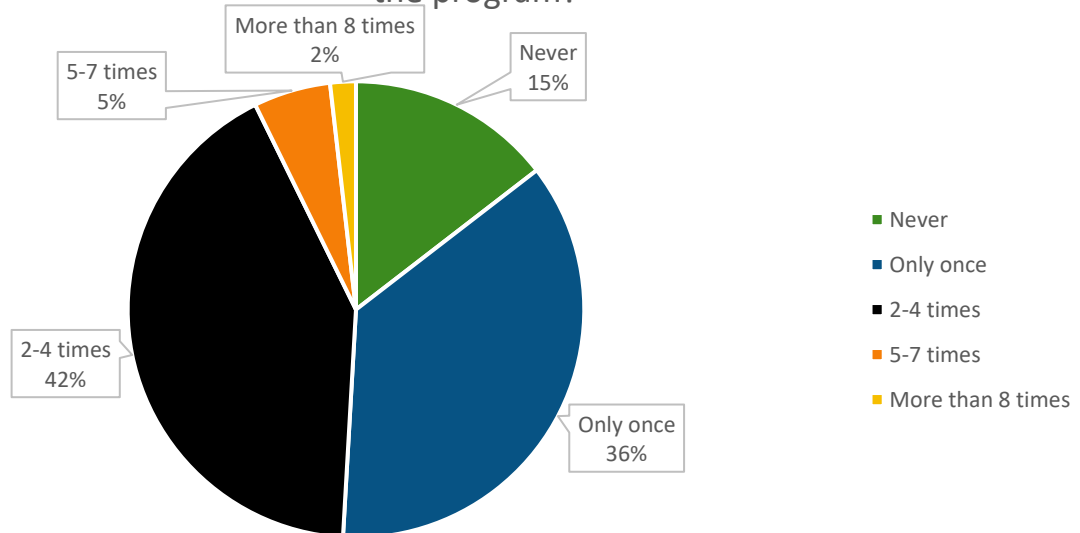
Of the 28 participants who were unemployed at the end of the program, 26 (93%) were looking for work. These and other participants reported engaging in a variety of job-seeking behaviors encouraged by the program—applying to a workplace exposure opportunity such as job shadowing/worksite visit or informational interview; completing job shadowing or a worksite visit; and completing an informational interview. Only 4 participants (7.3%) did not engage in any of these job-seeking activities, and 2 of them were already employed. The below charts summarize this data.



How many job shadowing/worksite visits have you completed during the program?



How many informational interviews have you completed during the program?



With these networking and work exposure efforts, it is hopeful that even those Bawsala participants who are still unemployed, will be able to find employment within a reasonable period—bolstered by their improved skills, as discussed in the following sections.

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS

Nine questions⁷ in our Intake/WORQ assessment measure core professional behaviors that are important for the job search. Participants’ responses to each of the following questions were scored on a scale of 1 to 5 and averaged for an overall score out of 5, showing significant improvement from pre to post.

Professional Behaviors	Pre-Program Avg	Post-Program Avg
1. How often each week do you go online to check your emails?*	4.27	4.62
2. Do you have a LinkedIn profile?†	2.42	4.56
3. How would you describe your career plan right now?‡	3.15	4.35
4. How many times have you written or updated your CV? *	2.39	3.51
5. How many times have you written a Cover Letter? *	1.58	2.49
6. How many times have you applied for a job? *	2.56	3.24
7. How many times did you take part in an interview for a job?*	2.10	2.05
8. How many professionals relevant to your career goals have you met?*	3.02	3.83
9. How many times have you attended a networking event that is relevant to your professional goals? *	2.64	3.69
OVERALL SCORE	2.70	3.59

Response Options were scored on a scale of 1-5:

* Never (1 point), Only once (2 points), 2-4 times (3 points), 5-7 times (4 points), 8 or more times (5 points)

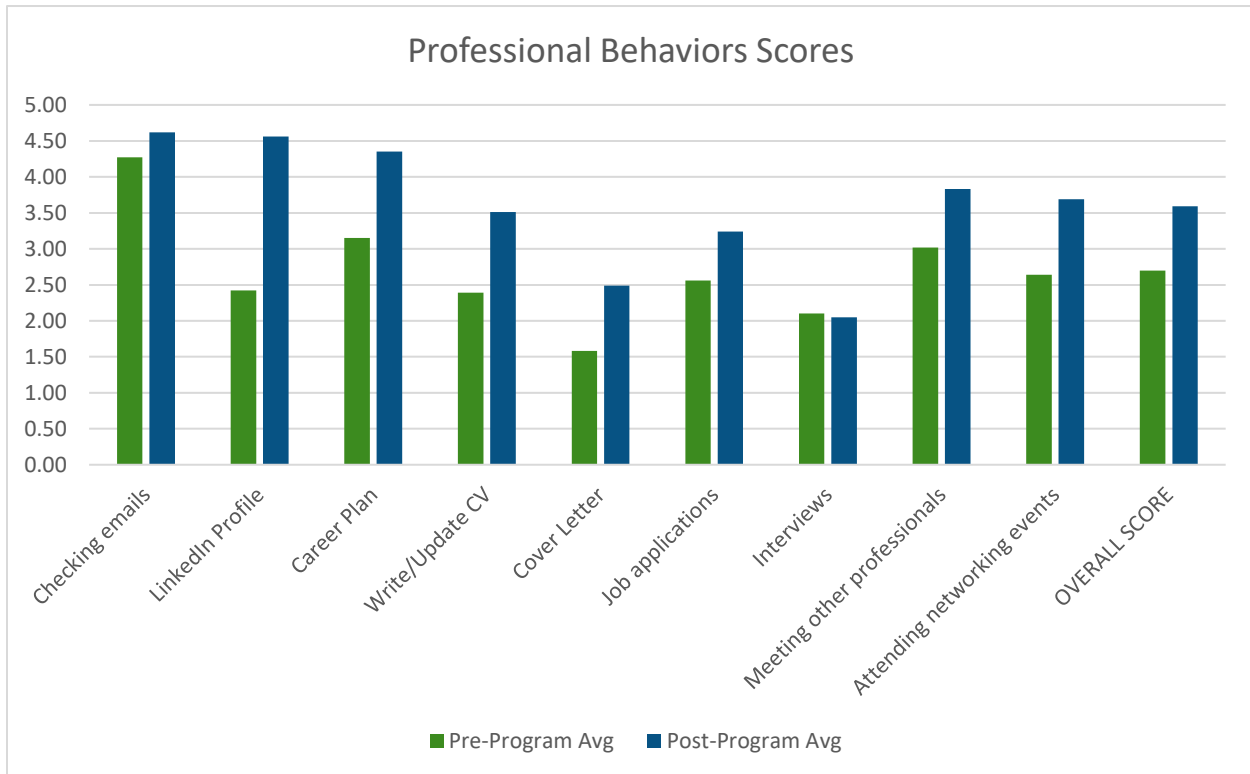
† No (1 point), Yes but it is not active (3 points), Yes and it is active (5 points)

‡ Honestly, I have no idea. I am just going to try things as I go. / I have given it some thought, but I don't have specific objectives. / I have specific objectives, but I'm not sure how to achieve them. / I have specific objectives, and I am currently trying to develop a plan. / I have specific objectives and I know exactly how to achieve them.

Participants’ professional behaviors scores improved an average of 39% from beginning to end of the program. 91% of participants (49 out of 54) showed a meaningful improvement, beyond a minimum threshold of 5% change. One participant experienced a minor decline in score, and four had no meaningful change. The most marked improvements were in maintaining an active LinkedIn profile, having a clearer career plan, updating/revising a CV multiple times for different specific job opportunities, writing cover letters, and attending professional networking events. In contrast, while participants clearly were applying

⁷ The full version of this assessment now includes two other questions—on seeking business funding and other professional development activities—for a total of 11; only 9 of these were used on both the pre and post-test.

for jobs during the program, this data suggests they did not achieve any new interviews—perhaps not surprising during a context of pandemic closures and business contraction.



SOFT SKILLS

Participants completed 16 questions from the psychometrically-validated WorkLinks Skills and Values Assessment (WLSVA) focused on measuring soft skills through Likert statements.⁸ The WLSVA measures five soft skills constructs that research shows are important for youth economic outcomes, including employment, job retention, and business success.⁹ The below table lists these five constructs and an example assessment item corresponding to each one; participants responded on a Likert scale including the options: Disagree totally, Disagree mostly, Agree somewhat, Agree mostly, Agree totally.

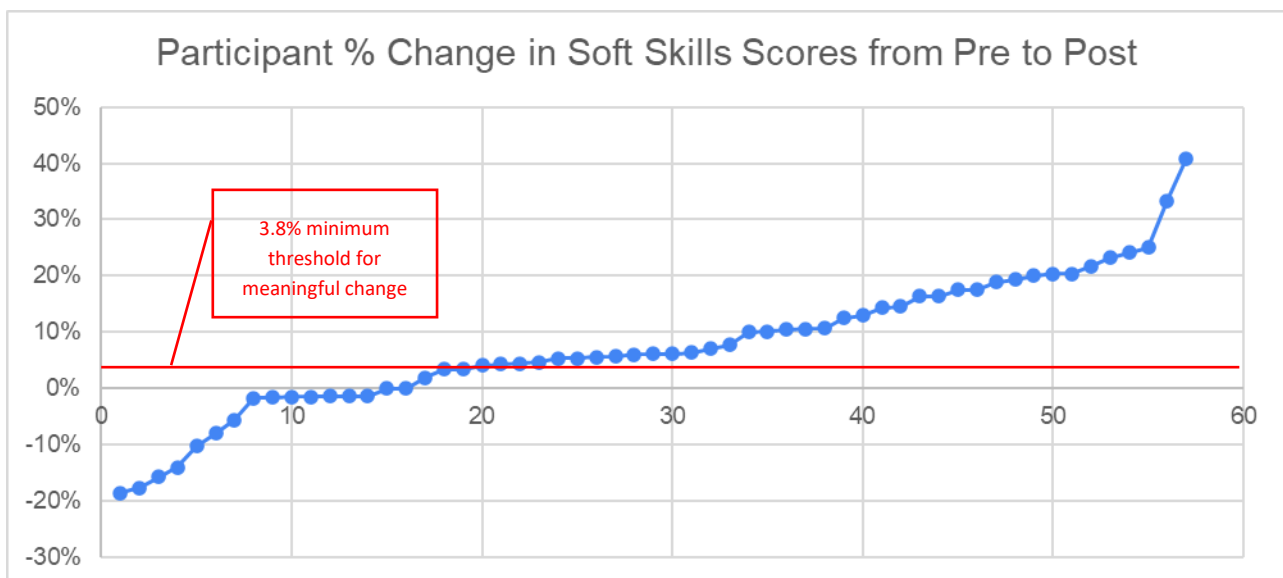
⁸ The assessment includes 23 soft skills items; however, program staff included only a subset of 16 on the pre-assessment, so this same subset was used to calculate post-assessment scores; as a result, a breakdown by skill construct is not offered even though all constructs were represented by at least two questions.

⁹ Lippman, L., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., & Moore, K. (2015). [Key "soft skills" that foster youth workforce success: Toward a consensus across fields](#). WorkForce Connections (FHI 360/USAID). For Iraq-specific evidence of the importance of these soft skills, also see the Southern Iraq Jobs Rapid Labor Market Assessment: <https://www.worldlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Report-Bawsala-Iraq-2019-2020-RLMA-Results.pdf>

Soft Skill Constructs	Example Item
Conscientiousness & Self-Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People can count on me to get tasks done.
Goal Setting & Perseverance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I set goals, I take action to reach them.
Interpersonal (Social) Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I listen carefully to what others say and I check that I have understood what they meant.
Managing Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I have conflict with others, I can manage my emotions without letting anger control me.
Thinking & Planning Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know how to find the causes and solutions to a problem.

Overall, 68% of participants (38 out of 56) significantly improved their soft skills, with an average of 8% score improvement (on the WLSVA, a soft skill score must improve by at least 3.8% to be considered meaningful change outside the bounds of possible measurement error). An 8% score improvement is equivalent to one degree of change on a quarter of the assessment questions—for example, a participant may have changed four of their responses from “Agree Somewhat” to “Agree Mostly” between the beginning and end of the program (or another similar combination of partial improvements).

At an individual level, 38 participants experienced a significant improvement, 11 had no meaningful change in their scores, and 7 (5 males and 2 females) had declining scores. The chart below shows each individual’s degree of soft skills score improvement from pre-program to post-program, illustrating the improvements in soft skills experienced by over two thirds of participants.



Our ability to achieve improved soft skills, and to measure them with the WLSVA tool, is a significant achievement. It is particularly remarkable that in this challenging time, with a curriculum that was originally designed to have many more in-person activities, but which had to be moved fully online, we have proof that 68% of our participants nonetheless improved their soft skills.

It is well known that measuring improvement in soft skills is challenging.¹⁰ Among the USAID Soft Skills Measurement Community of Practice, for example, many organizations have discussed challenges with declining scores being very common, since sometimes participants rate themselves highly at the beginning of the program, and then rate themselves more critically after they have learned more about what excellence in soft skills implies. Our carefully-validated WLSVA tool, and our decision to first assess soft skills at the end of the first module of our program (when participants already understand more about the standards employers are looking for), seem to have avoided this measurement challenge for most participants of the Southern Iraq Jobs program.

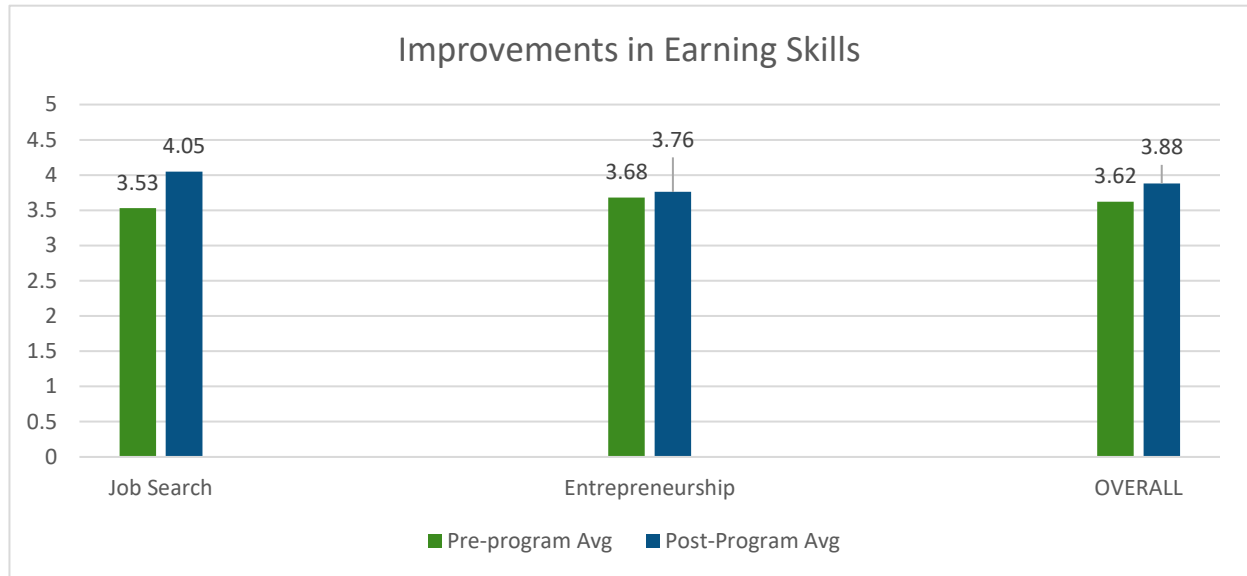
EARNING SKILLS

The WLSVA also includes 17 items focused on earning skills, including both job search skills and entrepreneurship skills. Because some participants are interested in one or the other pathway, while others are interested in both—and both represent pathways to improving youth economic status—we have found it more reliable to measure improvements in both of these skill domains together. Sub-scores are also provided below for each domain on its own, showing that participants improved their scores in each sub-domain with an overall score improvement from 3.62 to 3.88.

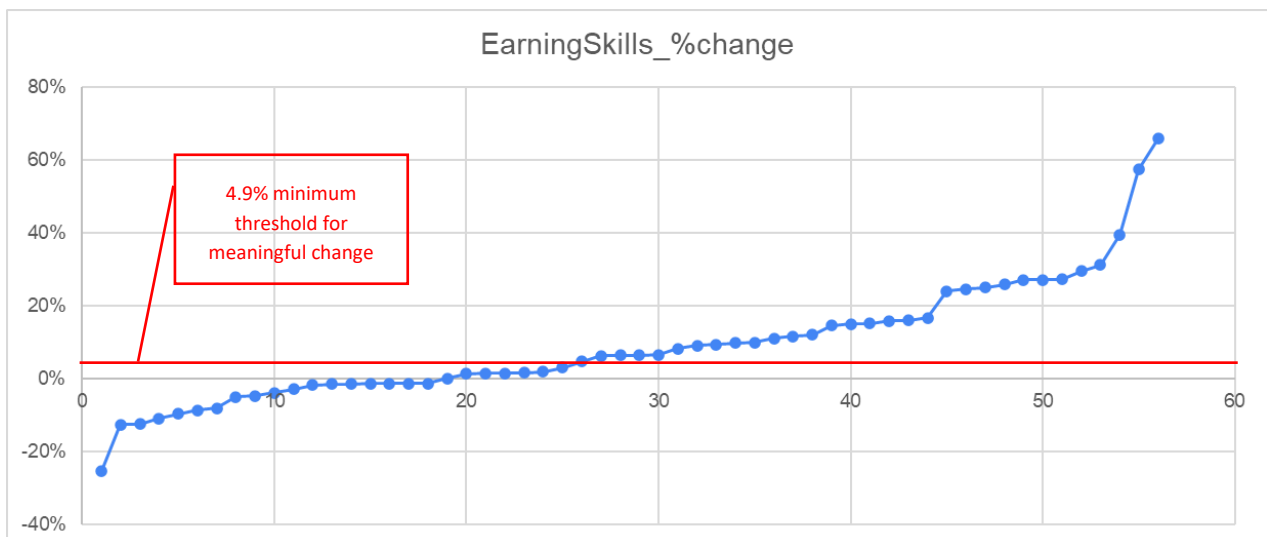
Earning Skills	Example Items	Pre-program Avg	Post-Program Avg
Job Search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am comfortable interviewing for a job. I have a very clear job search plan. I know how to write a resume/CV to match a particular job. 	3.53	4.05
Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I often notice things that could be improved or created. I am good at talking with people and building support for my ideas. I know how to keep track of my finances and plan for future expenses. 	3.68	3.76
OVERALL		3.62	3.88

¹⁰ See, for example: Galloway, T., Lippman, L., Burke, H., Diener, O., & Gates, S. (2017). Measuring soft skills and life skills in international youth development programs: A review and inventory of tools. Washington, DC: USAID YouthPower: Implementation.

The improvement in job search skills is the most evident in this analysis, which is understandable given that the focus of our career mentorship program is on preparing for employment, with just a brief introduction to entrepreneurship. To have a greater impact on entrepreneurship skills, the program would need to be longer or have a separate track focusing more closely on entrepreneurial knowledge and skills as well as accompanying young people in the business start-up process.



55% of participants (30 of 55) improved their earning skills score above the minimum threshold for detecting meaningful change (4.9% change as required by this subset of the WSLVA assessment). Average score improvement was 9%.



JOB SEARCH KNOWLEDGE

Finally, we measured a fourth domain—job search knowledge—through 9¹¹ true/false questions on common misconceptions and known best practices for a successful job search. Example items include:

- Employers may reject an application for just a small mistake. (True)
- To get an interview, all you usually need to do is submit an application. (False)
- You should not ask any questions in a job interview. (False)

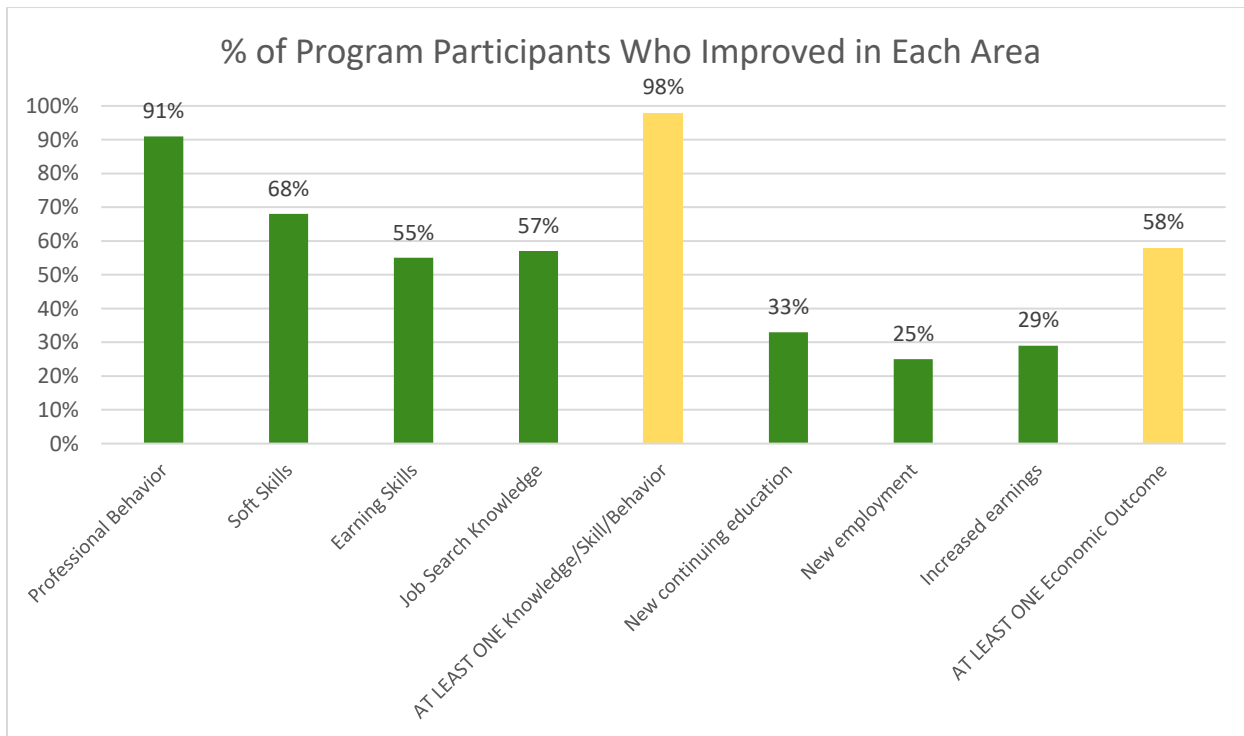
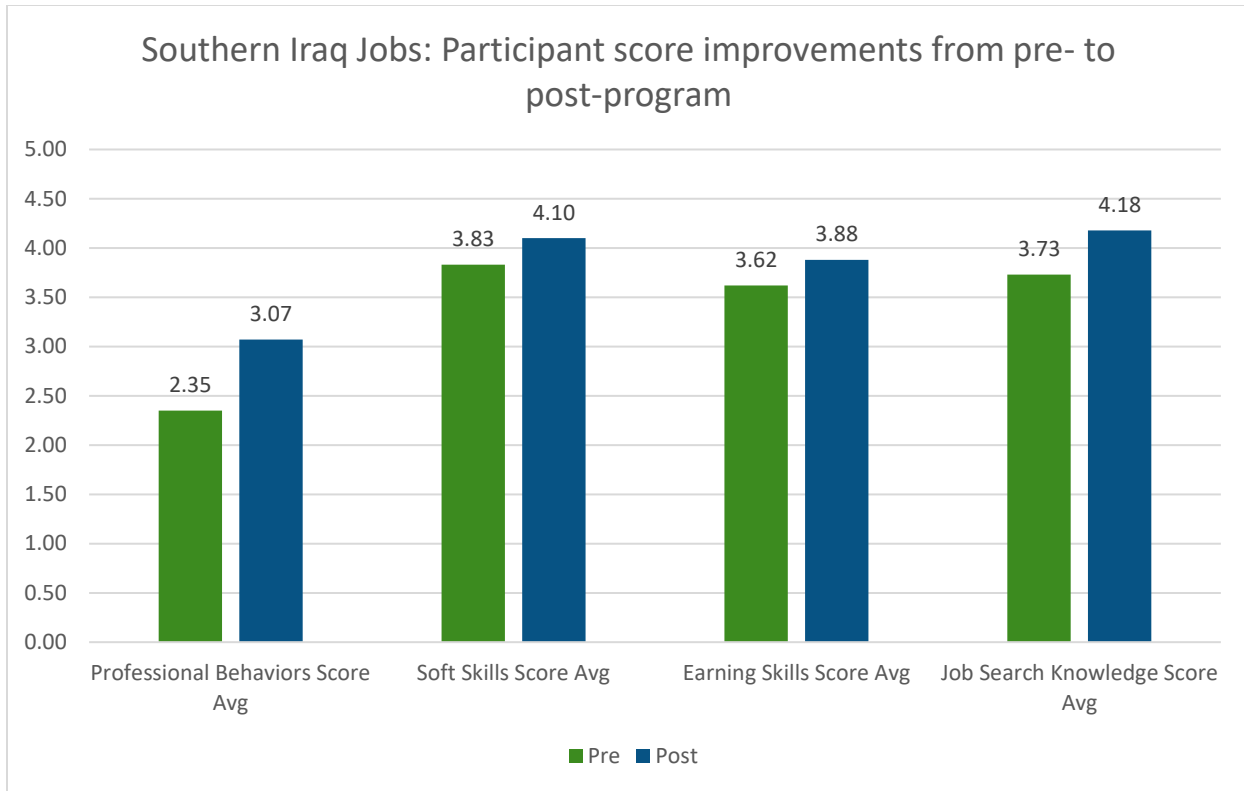
To correspond with the other score scales used in this project, the percentage correct was converted into a score from 0-5. Participants achieved an average score of 3.73 on the pre-test, and an average of 4.19 on the post-test (corresponding to 8.4 questions right out of 10). With this result, 31 participants (57%) improved their score from pre to post; however, 11 participants experienced no meaningful change above a +/-5% threshold, and 12 participants (22%) experienced a declining score. Given that we expect all participants to learn these core strategies about the job search during the program, we are reviewing the curriculum and our mentor training practices to ensure that this information is more clearly conveyed during the program.

OVERALL SCORE IMPROVEMENTS

Participants clearly benefited from the Southern Iraq Job Skills Program, with meaningful improvements in their knowledge, skills, behaviors, and their economic status over the course of their participation in the program. Average scores improved in all four areas that we analyzed for this program (professional behaviors, soft skills, earning skills, and job search knowledge). At an individual level, 91% of our participants improved in their professional behaviors, 68% improved their soft skills, 55% improved their earning skills, and 57% improved their job search knowledge, with 98% improving in at least one of these domains of knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Furthermore, 33% of participants were newly enrolled in continuing education or training, 25% had obtained new employment, and 29% increased their earnings, with 58% improving their status in at least one of these outcomes.

With 58% of participants already seeking further training, finding employment, or increasing their earnings, we hope for an opportunity to conduct a tracer study of participants after at least three months have passed, to track post-program outcomes more clearly.

¹¹ Originally this scale was out of 10 questions; however, we discovered that one question framed in the negative was confusing to the majority of participants, even those who otherwise scored very highly. This question was therefore removed from the post-assessment analysis, with those average scores calculated out of 9 questions. Clarity of the question has also been improved for future use of this assessment.



IMPACT OF THE SOUTHERN IRAQ JOBS PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS' CAREER GOALS

The soft skills, job search skills, entrepreneurship skills, and professional behaviors discussed so far in this report are important—but they will not lead to significant change in participants' lives unless they are put to service in pursuit of specific goals. When we asked participants about their career goals and whether they had changed since the start of the program, it was clear that this was a significant area of impact.

Most participants explained that although they had goals before beginning the program, their participation helped them refine those goals, make them more specific, and develop a clear plan to achieve them. One participant from Basrah remarked, for example, “The goals have not changed, but they have become more specific, and the way I work to reach them has changed.” He explained, “After getting a job, I have to work on reaching a place where I can become a certified trainer. I am doing that from now by taking advantage of developing my public speaking skills, by teaching my friends the job skills [from this program].”

Following is a selection of other participant remarks on this same theme; note that many participants refer to World Learning's “Bawsala”¹² Career Mentorship curriculum used within the Southern Iraq Jobs program.

Reflections on Career Goals from Southern Iraq Jobs Participants

Young Men	Young Women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I had specific goals from the start, but have become more aware of what I need to do to achieve them.” (Young man, Muthanna) • “The Bawsala program opened on the horizon from the widest doors. It increased my development in all aspects in terms of development, knowledge, increasing experience.... etc. [...] Goals in the academic aspect in academic success and gaining top grades in the department; daily goals in my own work and achieving success and money; goals in developing more in my specialty through professional courses; goals in online work; goals in religious development through religious scholar seminaries, memorization, rhetoric and reading courses; goals of strengthening personality through personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They have changed, they became smart goals and there is time and planning for everything to achieve them. Career counseling was very useful.” (Young woman, Maysan) • “Some of [my goals] have changed to a better and clearer picture, and some have been identified and became smart goals.” (Young woman, Maysan) • “[My goals are] graduation and getting a job that is commensurate with my specialization and the skills that I have, or completing studies in a field that I want to be different from my area of specialization, and develop my skills more and gain new experience and skills. I changed a lot; my goals were not defined and dispersed. Now they became specific and of

¹² Bawsala means “compass” in Arabic.

<p>training workshops in psychology; other goals in my own reality in creating a successful project.” (Young man, Dhi Qar)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The change and the difference became evident by gathering ideas and placing them on plans and knowing which is realistic and which can be applied. One of my professional goals in my field of specialization is the establishment of an institute for teaching, and after revising this, and asking mentors for guidance and direction, I developed a plan with different and modern ideas. So many thanks to them and you.” (Young man, Maysan) 	<p>great importance in my future work.” (Young woman, Basrah)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My goals include developing the technical knowledge that qualifies me to work as a mechanical engineer in the private sector, and I have an interest in pioneering companies that I intend to work with. So currently I have tasked myself with achieving what should be available, especially in the field of design, management and marketing, as well as developing my skills in programming and the English language because I am working on a business project that requires such skills from me, which I want to start before graduation, Insa'allah.” (Young woman, Basrah)
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Some participants also spoke about their increased flexibility—such as a new willingness to start with an internship or a lower-level job in order to begin the path they were interested in, or newly valuing careers and occupations beyond those of their specific academic training. This increased flexibility may prove to be very important in a challenging economic context, where opportunities in youth’s first preferences or direct field of training may not be available. Following are some example remarks about this increased flexibility:

- “Yes, I have changed. My current professional goals are to develop myself to get a job opportunity—even if it is a job opportunity for training without earning money—and then start working with offices or companies to make money, until I acquire the appropriate experience to open my own office and employ others in it.” (Young woman, Muthanna)
- “Yes, it changed. I used to think only of one specialization, but now I love several specialties and would like to work with them and try them out, such as photography, advertising management and many others.” (Young man, Muthanna)
- “I cannot say that it has changed, but it is possible to say that it has evolved and improved and I am no longer committed only to my field of work as a material resource. After the program, I can do anything that I am interested in.” (Young woman, Maysan)

Finally, some participants’ remarks—especially those of a few young women—spoke particularly to the development of greater confidence. One young woman from Muthanna wrote, “The program has helped me widen my vision of professional fields that were vague. It made it easier for me to be in a job interview. Now I am ready to be in any interview or work that I find suitable.” And another from her same mentor group wrote, “I know my goals better, and my strengths.”



Overall, it is clear that participants gained significant benefits from the Southern Iraq Jobs program. This young man from Dhi Qar summed up what many seemed to feel: “Before my participation in the program, my goals were dispersed and I do not know how to walk towards them. But after I entered the Bawsala program, I had a vision and promised ways to reach my goals, and how to achieve them through stages, and my goals became renewed over time.”